

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Developing Children's Ministry



SESSION 6

Global Diversity and Ministry
in the Church

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Global Diversity and Ministry in the Church

SESSION OVERVIEW

The Child in a Diverse Global World

Basic Approaches to Children's Ministry

Other Approaches Based on Challenges

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- understand current global factors that shape the world of children.
- identify key components in child- and family-based approaches to ministry.
- explore alternative models around events, worship, and advocacy ministries.

Global Diversity and Ministry in the Church

INTRODUCTION



Ministry in the Church of the Nazarene includes the global mandate to make disciples in the nations. In the past three lessons, we looked closely at the personal lives of children and the primary role of families and churches, as well as historical and contemporary influences. What does this mandate look like in a diverse global setting? The following lesson sketches some large global issues and also looks at the diverse approaches to ministry that many churches employ in light of that diversity.

There is no doubt that discipleship remains a key mandate for children's leaders within the Church of the Nazarene. The mission of the Church of the Nazarene is: "To make Christlike disciples among the nations." While the biblical basis for the church's mission is true of our mission for children, the unique needs of children require some careful application of those basic Scriptural principles. As recently as 2012, the Church of the Nazarene celebrated a full decade focused on connecting children with Christ. Living out such a mandate on a global scale requires a network of leadership guided by Global Sunday School Discipleship Ministries International (Global SDMI) working in diverse cultural settings.

THE CHILD IN A DIVERSE GLOBAL WORLD



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While the early history of ministry to children may have proceeded alongside the development of the western world, future leaders will need to contextualize ministry based on challenges within their global setting. The spiritual life of the child remains the church's primary concern, but it must always be connected holistically to every other aspect of the child's life. We may not always be able to remove the social and cultural obstacles facing children, but we can work to increase the resiliency in children, both physically and spiritually, while also listening to their journeys in these settings.

Cultural Differences

Our first responsibility rests with understanding the diversity of culture and its implication in our understanding of a child's world. Simply put, some cultures put more emphasis on the individual, stressing individual ability and achievement. In these cultures, even families are understood at their most basic—"nuclear"—composition (parents and children). Other cultures tend to extend privileges collectively, a "kinship" approach that stresses greater interpersonal abilities and social conformity and depends on the extended family, if not the entire tribe, to provide the basic framework for child rearing. We need to acknowledge that there are a number of different global cultural values that may be instilled in children as a part of their discipleship.

Sherwood Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayer, in their book *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*, note that many cultures differ in their basic orientations to the world and to each other. The authors include the following key categories:

- **Time:** Some cultures seem very time conscious and concerned about being punctual and finishing on time. Other cultures tend to be more event oriented, content to start when everyone is ready and finish when deemed appropriate for the gathering at hand.
- **Judgment:** Some cultures tend to see stark differences between options when making a decision, seeing the world with a "right versus wrong" or "black and white" mindset. Other cultures tend to be more contextual when it comes to decision-making, understanding that some decisions might be better than others but not necessary correct, stressing the "shades of grey" of decision-making.


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- **Handling Crises:** Some cultures value extensive preparation for future potential crises, even at the expense of current comfort. Other cultures tend to value a person's ability to respond creatively and decisively in the midst of crisis—known as “thinking on your feet”—and so tend to defer preparation until needed.
- **Goals:** Some cultures value a task orientation stressing completing goals in a timely and efficient manner. Other cultures focus are relationship oriented, so that goals may be subservient to relational needs.
- **Individual Worth:** Some cultures focus more on human effort and achievement as a signal of the worth of the individual. Children may be prized for their performance ability or their accomplishments. Other cultures bestow worth at birth, based on social order or just because the person is part of the community.
- **Vulnerability:** Cultures vary on how much vulnerability people can appropriately show either in times of crises or endearment. Some cultures prefer stoic responses to interpersonal challenges and relationships, while other cultures value openly emotional displays.

Lingenfelter and Mayer serve an important role in reminding children's leaders that often, cultural norms shape expectations both of childhood and discipleship. However, these categories do not exhaust potential differences, since other interpersonal issues, such as dealing with conflict, vary from culture to culture. (For instance, some cultures deflect conflict, preferring to discuss the conflict as a problem to be solved impersonally. Other cultures value direct confrontation about the issue at hand.) This observation merely confirms that children's leaders must remain culturally sensitive and responsive to the heritage of children based on their cultural and ethnic heritage. Rosa Hernandez Sheets, in her work with schools on Diversity Pedagogy, offers several reminders to children's leaders as they engage cultural differences in their ministry settings:

- Children bring culturally-mediated, historically-developing knowledge, practices, values, and skills to school.
- Cultural displays emerge during social interactions, daily rituals, and learning situations and are consequential to the development, achievement, and emotional wellbeing of children.
- Children may choose to reveal or conceal, and can feel encouraged to display or be compelled to suppress, culturally-influenced behaviors, skills, attitudes, and knowledge.


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- It benefits children psychologically to express their cultural knowledge, strengths, and skills.

As children's ministry develops globally, children's leaders will require more culturally aware responses for the sake of the gospel. The book of Acts demonstrates the power of the gospel to work across diverse cultures, bringing a message of hope and reconciliation. However, leaders often had to set aside their own cultural assumptions to allow the Holy Spirit to work. When cultures come together in local congregations, regardless of our global settings, leaders will need to create places of safety and hospitality to enable children to grow and express themselves in culturally-acceptable forms.

Global Challenges

Even as leaders in children's ministry embrace cultural differences, there are some common challenges children face that they—and we—must work together to overcome. Kristin Herzog, in her book *Children and Our Global Future* (2005), notes that globally, children are often portrayed as “saviors” of the next generation. This vision surfaces from various investments in children by adults in industrial societies and through images, including the image of the baby Jesus and various images from other world religions, where living like a child reflects childlike wisdom and power. Still, Herzog notes that children easily become victims as well, whether to control and neglect in more industrialized countries or through poverty and violence in impoverished regions of the world. We must accept that children do not always receive the best treatment even in the West. The prevalence of child abuse in industrial countries quickly dispels the notion that children of privilege are safer than children in underdeveloped nations.

Children are vulnerable in many world regions. If one merely reviews current global statistics concerning child health and welfare, a number of critical areas surface where children desperately need assistance. Often these needs involve basic life provisions, education, and freedom from violence. Organizations like UNICEF and World Vision reveal alarming conditions related to sanitation, clean water, food, shelter, and health care for children. Websites dedicated to maintaining these statistics often amaze readers from industrialized settings (see e.g., UNICEF, unicef.org, accessed online August 2021; World Vision, worldvision.org, accessed online August 2021; and Nazarene Compassionate Ministries, ncm.org/holisticchilddevelopment, accessed online August 2021).

Many children never receive education at all. Educational systems often fail during global crises, but children are also sometimes denied access based

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on economics, social class, and gender. Children lack the ability to improve their lot in life, since they often grow up without the training to advance their communities. What might surprise people is the fact that a lack of education occurs in western nations as well, often due to poverty and transient lifestyles. One organization that monitors the state of children in the United States offers disturbing statistics concerning children who are unable or unwilling to finish school. These children have few options or opportunities and often end up in the justice system (childrensdefense.org, accessed online August 2021).

Finally, children suffer violence and abuse at the hands of adults and other children. Abuse of children comes in many forms. Children can be abused sexually, physically, emotionally, and even spiritually. In addition to abuse, many children face neglect that interferes with normal development. This neglect may be intentional, or it may be the result of inadequate understanding of the responsibilities of parenting or due to the impoverished condition of parents and social groups around the children. In a later lesson, we will discuss the church's role in insuring safety for children within the life of the congregation.

Violence and abuse occur in many social settings, with children being the most vulnerable victims. Child trafficking research reveals profound social issues and calls the church to acknowledge and respond in the face of this challenge. This problem exists globally, including western industrial settings. While children remain dependent on parents and society for nurture and guidance, they also need people to assert their basic rights as human beings. Global agencies work diligently to protect these vulnerable children. (See childrenatrisk.org, accessed online August 2021; and unicef-irc.org, accessed online August 2021.)

Children live in a culturally diverse and challenging world. Children's leaders find themselves faced with a range of issues when considering how to best nurture and disciple children in our global context. However, the church is not left without resources, if only in the form of basic approaches to children's ministry.

BASIC APPROACHES TO CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

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One of the most common errors that children's leaders make in working at different churches is to think that what worked well at one church will surely work just as well at another church. Church leaders in every field have left the ministry bewildered after facing problems in a new ministry that they never experienced in their previous ministry. In all fairness, there can be lots of reasons for congregational problems; however, children's leaders should be aware that approaches to children's ministry reflect both cultural expectations and challenges.

The idea of approaches to children's ministry may relate to program strategies. For instance, Scottie May and her colleagues in their book *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family and Community*, list several approaches or metaphors to children ministry that include differing philosophies of ministry. They include a basic schooling model that emphasizes religious instruction, a "win a prize" approach that emphasizes competitively rewarding children for activities, and a carnival approach that emphasizes a fun and entertaining way to capture children's attention. In addition, the authors include a pilgrimage metaphor to describe adults working relationally with children along their developmental journey; and a "dance with God" metaphor, their most elusive approach, that seems to represent a spiritual mentoring or apprenticeship approach. Obviously, each of these metaphors shape the overall design of the ministry and commitment of resources. Still, even these approaches might be more North American in nature.

To understand a more global approach, we will resort to slightly larger frameworks shaping the core of ministry but that might be shared globally. The two most basic approaches (which can be seen as two ends of a continuum rather than two competing approaches) rest with the basic orientation of ministry, the child, or the family. After exploring this primary orientation, we will suggest other approaches that might be helpful in light of global diversity and challenges. In the programming module, we will revisit this information.

Child-Oriented Ministry

The child-oriented approach to children's ministry primarily uses the ministry's time, energy, and resources only on the children within the ministry. This focus does not imply a selfish, neglectful, or even an exclusive attitude. Yet, the children attending the church are the target group—the group that shapes the focus and direction of the ministry. By definition, it might seem that all Children's Ministries focus on those children attending the church. This approach might include outreach as well, but the children in the church remain the primary focus.

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There are several reasons for this approach. A potentially negative reason is that a child has family problems or lacks a spiritual home environment. More positive reasons include allowing the children opportunity (under leadership) to interact with peers, to learn according to their developmental capacities, and to insure a safe environment within the church. Often associated with this approach is a sense that the main body of the church will take responsibility for children, even if only through the efforts of children's leaders and volunteers. Undoubtedly, this approach owes a lot to the North American advent of the public schools system (children may well be segregated based on age-related grades). However, this intentional separation of children from adults for focused study predates the public school system (going as far back as the Greek and Roman eras).

When we take a child-oriented approach, we often work to discover the individual needs of children and strive to meet those needs. However, we also risk segregating children from the rest of the adult community if we take the approach too far. Depending on the amount of time we spend discipling these children, we may often overlook other familial and social forces that shape these kids' everyday lives, much like those mentioned by Uri Bronfenbrenner in a previous lesson. With this approach, we may have to be intentional in presenting children to the rest of the worshiping community and insuring their place within the life of the church.

Family-Oriented Ministry

Family-oriented ministry takes a primarily different approach to ministering to children. Leaders assume that the child is not an island separate from the family. Instead, the child lives and operates within that system. A primary belief that governs this approach assumes that, in order to truly help the children in the ministry situation, families must be a priority as well. For example, a children's leader operating from this approach plans activities that include the parents. They will also work hard to keep parents informed and involved. Leaders often offer special training sessions organized to give parents help in understanding their children and their needs. Workshops, family retreats, parent support groups, and other activities often fall under the responsibility of the children's minister. When the parents are better equipped and better informed, the possibility of a positive outcome for the child increases greatly. One does not neglect the child for the sake of the parents; the ministry simply broadens and redirects its responsibility to children and their families.

Some cultures assume this approach due to the nature of their definition of family, which may include extended family members, kinship connections. Context often shapes basic assumptions. If children's leaders perceive that families appear to be "in trouble" (personally or spiritually), they may approach

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families as if they are in need of repair. Other leaders may assume that families have ultimate control and authority over children and may seem reluctant to offer resources or advice. Finally, other leaders may understand that families remain quite diverse, but possess the ability to help their children grow when they have the right resources. Parents may also share these assumptions and, as noted earlier, feel either overconfident or overwhelmed with their responsibility to disciple their children. A balance must be developed so that parents see the church as a support in their role as spiritual leaders in their homes.

Some leaders using this approach might include a focus on community building as a foundational principle. Just as the immediate family proves critical for the child's outcome, the health of the church is important for the health of its members. The health of the church is also related to the health of those in the community. And the well-being of those in the community is related to the well-being of those who govern and provide resources. This "systems approach" represents an extension of the family orientation, one that looks at the interconnectedness of the family, church, community, and world.

As noted earlier, neither approach need be exclusive of the other's perceived needs and goals. However, globally, cultures will resonate more with one approach than with the other. Western, industrialized settings have a history of segregating the child in society for many reasons, both good and bad. Children were segregated for instruction but also for work during the early industrial era. Even if children were free from labor, they were often segregated so parents might work. Other cultural settings do not separate the child from the family, though they may define "family" more broadly than Westerners. Children may have been forced apart from their birth families due to slavery, poverty, war, or other disasters, but found themselves "adopted" by other adults, be they extended family or just members of the community. Culture and context shape a lot of the expectations for the agents of discipleship. Children's leaders must understand this diversity.

OTHER APPROACHES BASED ON CHALLENGES



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Beyond child- and family-oriented ministry, there are a number of other approaches. As suggested in the book, *Children Matters*, some churches focus on activity- or event-based ministry, planning well-designed, purposeful events that provide legitimate opportunities for children to experience God and spiritual change. Other approaches center on worship, usually at the age level of the child, providing independent worship experiences or a children's church framework. Still other leaders approach children's ministry from the standpoint of participation in the life of the congregation, focusing on incorporating children intentionally into the life of the church, including them in worship, fellowship, and service alongside adults.

In light of the global challenges discussed earlier, two other approaches to children's ministry should be mentioned. The first approach might be understood as a needs-based approach, where children's leaders directly help children with their problems. The second approach is advocacy for children, where adults speak on behalf of children in the middle of their challenges.

Needs-Based Approach

The needs-based approach works well both for children in the middle of a challenge and also "with" children and families within the local congregation who can help raise resources and support for other kids at risk. "Needs-based" describes ministries that directly engage a crisis situation with children in mind. The crises may be episodic and short-term (natural disasters) or they may be chronic and long-term (poverty or health care problems). Children are vulnerable in either setting. Children's leaders may need to assess what they are able to do and where care might best be given to children. Children's workers may dedicate themselves to crisis relief efforts, particularly enlisting children to create and provide the needed services. Short-term aid may be crucial in these circumstances.

At other times leaders may approach a more chronic problem with a "community development" mindset. In these settings, ministry often addresses basic needs like clean water, hygiene, and education. The goal may be for the community to resolve these issues for the long term, so that children are freed from a cycle of deprivation and struggle. Such approaches require a longer-term commitment in partnership with other groups, but can still include children working to develop resources.

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In either approach, children's ministry leaders need to work closely with those who understand the culture where the challenges occur. Children's leaders must be careful that their intentions and actions are fully understood. Children often prove most accepting, particularly when caring adults meet them in the middle of their needs. Adults, however, must be careful about the nature of social boundaries and cultural norms, even in their most compassionate moments.

Child Advocacy

Child advocacy seeks to speak for children in the challenges they face. Advocacy ministry may enlist both children and families, but often, this form of ministry requires a complex understanding of the issues at hand. In this setting, a children's ministry leader may work to inform the congregation of the plight of children in the world or in their community. Advocacy may include a "public stance" by the church for the sake of children. This approach might best be understood as one where the church serves as a "witness" to God's grace as well as God's justice. Advocacy pushes children's leaders into broader social settings, but also empowers them to evangelize based on God's love for children and God's embrace of their vulnerability. While often least associated with traditional children's ministry in North America, this form of ministry may prove important in a number of global settings.

Advocacy, however, includes how every congregation takes steps to insure the safety and security of each child. In a future lesson, we will discuss child safety as a basic ministry responsibility. However, it is important to remember that each leader's willingness to undergo the necessary safety checks and insure the necessary safety procedures in their congregation represents a key form of advocacy for any child that might suffer abuse.

Overall, we live in a world beset with diverse cultures and complex challenges. Our ministry must reflect a deeper understanding of the world, particularly as people become much more interdependent and engaged globally. A local congregation may end up being a microcosm of this globally diverse people, including their children.

APPLICATION

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1. Identify one global region or country and research the challenges children face in that area.
2. Talk with parents about the cultural differences they see in how other groups/cultures deal with Lingenfelter and Mayer's different cultural patterns for relating with other people.
3. Discuss with leadership one basic local ministry that could help children deal with major problems globally.

EXAM



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1. Our definition of family is often culturally conditioned.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. According to Lingenfelter and Mayer, cross-cultural differences often include:
 - A. Handling crises differently.
 - B. How cultures handle money.
 - C. How to set goals.
 - D. A and C.
 - E. All of the above.
3. Cultures often vary in the way they understand whether decisions prove clear-cut or if there is some ambiguity involved.
 - A. True
 - B. False
4. Children rarely feel compelled to hide their cultural heritage or differences.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. Children from affluent industrialized communities rarely become victims of violence.
 - A. True
 - B. False
6. Globally, children need help with:
 - A. Education.
 - B. Violence.
 - C. Basis resources to sustain life.
 - D. A and C.
 - E. All of the above.
7. Children's ministry often has to address whether it will be either a child-oriented ministry or a family-oriented ministry.
 - A. True
 - B. False



8. Western culture tends to separate children from the rest of society.
 - A. True
 - B. False

9. The church should avoid public stances that advocate for children since it is not a true evangelistic endeavor.
 - A. True
 - B. False

10. Child safety is child advocacy.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



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Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Does our current ministry address children from other global regions? Why or why not?
2. In a multicultural encounter, would our leaders and volunteers be aware of cultural diversity?
3. If we have children in our ministry from another culture, would they feel free to share their cultural heritage, gifts, and abilities?
4. How does our congregation currently serve as advocates for children in our local community and across the world?

Review your answers with your mentor, then respond to the following:

How many responses focus on supporting children (particularly in areas where they are not yet fully self-reliant), and how many answers focus on empowering children?

Which of these answers support the goal of living Christlike relationships? Why?

What do we need to add to our list to make our approach more comprehensive, more faithful? Which do we need to incorporate into the role of the children's leader as one who both supports and empowers Christlike relationships with children?